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AUTHOR Sylva, Ron
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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that by thinking about a number of parameters in art and of the array that each parameter suggests, curriculum planners might select, organize, and relate particular experiences with greater assurance that the curriculum will provide adequate and representative ranges of art forms, and address their underlying modes of thinking in programs. The parameters should be applicable to all art experiences and to the four dimensions of engagement: (1) creating art; (2) responding to art; (3) historical inquiry; and (4) philosophical inquiry. The first operating principle for the parameters is that it should be possible to identify some primary characteristics of an art experience with an aspect of each parameter. The second operating principle is that the parameters and their aspects can provide some assurance that the fullest possible range of art experiences is provided. The parameters and their aspects are: (1) art area (fine, environmental, pragmatic); (2) medium (immediate, technological, conceptual); (3) mindset (spontaneity, precision, ingenuity); (3) dimensions (four, three, two); (4) process (manipulate, add, subtract, transform); (5) approach (juxtapose, realize, synthesize); (6) intention (interpretive, expressive, formalistic); (7) imagery (realistic, abstract, non-objective); and (8) subject (people, surroundings, ideas and emotions, art). Explanations of each parameter and its aspects are excluded. Perspectives provided by the dimensions are identified and discussed. For example, creating and responding are defined as the interchange between significance and form, hence responding to art is an equally creative act; while in the matter of response and historical inquiry, the response can be fuller if the context within which the piece was created is understood. (DK)

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The Parameters of Art

Ron Sylva

University of Cincinnati

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Ron Sylva

University of Cincinnati

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Introduction

When we think of the array of art forms that constitute the body of art, even the most familiar ones, they present a rich and, at the same time, bewildering menu of variations, alternatives, combinations, overlaps and departures. And, when we begin to wrestle with the varieties of experience, the ways of thinking, and the ways of working that an adequate program in art should address, we are challenged to go beyond a simple catalogue of familiar art forms.

A significant consequence of the currently proposed four-fold expansion of the ways that students can learn to engage with art, is a necessary reduction of the content from the body of art with which they may become engaged, given that the time available for education about art will remain fixed. Even before the inclusion of response (criticism), philosophical inquiry (aesthetics), and historical inquiry (art history) as additional dimensions of engagement, decisions about the constitution of an adequate program of art forms, i.e., what to select (and a substantial rationale for those selections) was an inadequately addressed question. The sense of a bountiful menu to choose from

overrode any sense that there were important criteria to be identified, and critical decisions to be made, here. An expansion of the content of art to include the environmental and pragmatic arts requires a similar reassessment. And, the introduction of contemporary media will reduce even further the amount of time that can be spent with traditional art forms such as drawing, painting, ceramics, and sculpture. Of course, it is possible to claim that the array of art forms can remain just such a bountiful menu, and that it is perfectly proper to call up elements, or aspects, of those art forms as convenient examples for illustrating a point in response, or in historical or philosophical inquiry. And that claim has its greatest validity when the point to be made transcends specific works.

Identifying an adequate and representative array of art forms is indeed a challenge. But, if we were to begin thinking about a number of parameters in art and of the array that each parameter suggests, we might select, organize and relate particular experiences with greater assurance that we are, indeed, providing adequate and representative ranges of art forms, and that we are addressing their underlying modes of thinking, in our programs. We might also feel more

confident that movement from one experience to the next is based on developing and relating concepts and skills within a structure, rather than simply adding to a collection. And, we might be in a better position to develop a clearer set of ideas of what there is to be taught; that is, a basis for learning how to ***derive*** objectives as well as how to construct them.

The Parameters

The parameters should be applicable to all art experiences and to the four dimensions of engagement; creating art, responding to art, historical inquiry and philosophical inquiry. It should be possible to develop learning experiences that are significantly different in the way that students create art; in the varieties of art that they can respond to; in the ways that they can conceive of relationships to other art that has been created; and in the ways that the experience stimulates continued reexamination of the nature of art. The parameters can be used to develop relatively simple sets of learning for students just beginning an engagement with art. They can be used to explore more sophisticated and advanced learning as students develop a richer store of concepts and abilities.

The first operating principle for the parameters is that it should be possible to identify some primary characteristics of an art experience with an aspect of each parameter. That is, art experiences can be identified as two dimensional, three dimensional or four dimensional in form. That same group can be re-sorted as to whether the experiences involve fine art forms, environmental art forms, or pragmatic art forms. And, those same art experiences can be categorized as being concerned with the intention to be interpretive, expressive, or formalistic, and so on. The second operating principle is that the parameters and their aspects can provide some assurance that the fullest possible range of art experiences is provided. The value of this approach is considered to be in the analysis of an art experience to provide a clear and coherent basis for identifying what there is to be taught about it.

The Parameters and their aspects

ART AREA

FINE ENVIRONMENTAL PRAGMATIC

MEDIUM

IMMEDIATE TECHNOLOGICAL CONCEPTUAL

MINDSET

SPONTANEITY PRECISION INGENUITY

DIMENSIONS

FOUR THREE TWO

PROCESS

MANIPULATE ADD SUBTRACT TRANSFORM

APPROACH

JUXTAPOSE REALIZE SYNTHESIZE

INTENTION

INTERPRETIVE EXPRESSIVE FORMALISTIC

IMAGERY

REALISTICS ABSTRACT NON-OBJECTIVE

SUBJECT

PEOPLE SURROUNDINGS IDEAS/EMOTIONS ART

Explication of the Parameters

Art Area

Fine Art refers to such art forms as; painting, drawing, sculpture, printmaking, film, photography, and video.

Environmental arts refer to such art forms as architecture, interior design, and planning.

Pragmatic art refers to such art forms as industrial design, fashion design, and graphic design.

Medium

Immediate refers to images and forms created by working directly with the medium or material, using relatively simple tools.

Technological refers to images and forms created through a more complicated, and somewhat indirect, technical process.

Conceptual refers to a visual idea created with relatively little, or no, actual manipulation of materials, or elements

mindset

Spontaneity refers to experiences that allow and encourage a flexibility of thinking in process, radical changes in concept, and rapid modification of form, or imagery.

Precision refers to experiences that encourage, require and develop an ability and appreciation for control and craftsmanship.

Ingenuity refers to experiences that allow and encourage modifications and new combinations of, media and techniques.

dimensions

Four dimensions refers to art that emphasizes time, change and motion as the essential plastic materials.

Three dimensions refers to art that consists of form and/or that defines and engages space.

Two dimensions refers to art that is in a flat plane or that suggests three, or four dimensions on a two dimensional plane.

process

Manipulative refers to art processes and art and design forms that are created by rearranging plastic materials, or elements.

Additive refers to art forms that are created by the accumulation of elements.

Subtractive refers to those art and design forms created by the removal of unwanted, or irrelevant material.

Transformational refers to those art forms created indirectly, by means of an intervening negative, or complementary device, i.e., a plate, or mold.

approach

Juxtapose refers to those art forms created by joining two or more elements possessing separate identities so that a new form with a new identity is created, e.g., a collage, or an assemblage.

Realize refers to the recognition of possibilities in an object, or situation, and the development of that perceived potential, e.g., photography, or sculpture originating from a found form.

Synthesize refers to the creation of forms and images using a medium that does not, in itself, suggest a form, or image; a creation with an integrity and structure that respects, but is not dictated by, the nature of the material employed, e.g., drawing, clay sculpture.

Intention

Interpretation refers to the act of giving form to perceptions of externals; of aspects, or significances of phenomena in ones surroundings.

Expression refers to the act of giving form to personal significances; to ideas or feelings, internal to oneself.

Formalistic refers to the act of creating forms whose primary significance is found in the visual and tactile excitement and interest of the interplay of colors, surfaces, forms and textures, and of the sensitive, disciplined, sometimes outrageous judgements about the ways that they may be related. 'Meaning', in the usual sense, is not a direct concern.

imagery

Realistic refers to images and forms derived from, and representing, actual appearances.

Abstract refers to images and forms that emphasize, and transform, particular qualities, or ideas, with a considerably reduced literal realism.

Non-objective refers to images and forms that have little or no intended visual correspondence to phenomena in the world

subject

People; oneself, significant others, individuals and groups, or the human form, itself, chosen for any number of reasons.

Surroundings; Spaces, forms and objects that surround us.

Ideas and emotions; symbolized by actual situations, or by pure form and color.

Art; forms, images and events that are based on the intrinsic interest of concepts and processes of art, or, as a commentary on assumptions about art itself.

Every experience in art should address one aspect of each parameter with some attention to the way that each of the aspects of a parameter engages the mind, makes use of the concepts of art, and provides differing possibilities for images and forms. This should be true in responding to a work of art, as well as in creating one. It is also another way of examining the art of the past and present.

Of course, every art experience can not ***really*** be limited exclusively to one aspect of each parameter. In some sense, all of the aspects of each parameter may be found in all art. And, the more sophistication and experience that an individual develops, the more aspects from each parameter may be included in a single engagement with art. But one aspect can be emphasized to provide a more coherent structure for teaching and learning early in the experience of the teacher, as well as of the student.

Finally, it should be noted that, while all of the parameters contribute in some fashion to all art experiences, the specific nature of each experience may call for particular emphasis, or elaboration, for some parameters, with a correspondingly lighter attention to others. An arbitrarily equal emphasis on all parameters and their selected aspects would not allow adequate attention to essential elements of a given experience.

Art programs should examine both the highest accomplishments, and the most prevalent contemporary manifestations of these forms.

Fine Arts: Traditional to cutting edge. The range of experiences should include classic and newer versions of art forms such as drawing, painting, printmaking, etc., and newer media such as video and computer graphics.

Environmental Arts: Traditional to vernacular. The range of experiences should include exemplary architectural forms from the past and present and contemporary structures such as fast food restaurants, shopping malls, schools, etc.

Pragmatic Arts: Traditional to popular. The range of experiences should include the best of fashion, graphic, and industrial design and such

immediate forms as magazines, toys, games, cars and current trends in clothing

The four dimensions of engagement, or disciplines can be brought to bear on an ***art object*** (how a form can be given significance), or on an ***artform*** (how a significance can be given form), as parallel, and complementary means for engagement.

With An Art Object As The Focus: Each of the four may be engaged with an image, form, or event. Response would be concerned with constructing, or deriving a personal, but validated, meaning, or significance for the piece. Historical Inquiry would be concerned with exploring the circumstances of its creation and with the influences that contributed to its creation. Philosophical Inquiry would be concerned with exploring the way that the qualities, or intentions exemplify, or challenge, a concept of art. Creating would be concerned with re-creating those understandings in a new context, or with a different art form.

With An Art Form As The Focus: The four may be engaged with a representative art form. Response would be concerned with clarifying the significances to be given form in the piece, and in evaluating the evolving form. Historical Inquiry would be concerned with the ways that the anticipated image, or form, and the

intended significances have been approached by other artists, cultures and movements. Philosophical Inquiry would be concerned with examining the ways that the evolving, or finished, piece may transcend mere combining of information, concepts and techniques; that is, how it may be thought of as Art. Creating would be concerned with giving form to a meaning, or intention, making use of the particular potential provided by the characteristics of the medium.

Perspectives Provided By The Dimensions

Creating and Responding: the interchange between significance and form. There are parallels in the thought processes for creating and responding. The response process serves to bring an intention to creating which is at a conscious and articulate level, as a sort of formative evaluation. Responding to art is an equally creative act, rather than a mere decoding, or an unquestioning acceptance of significances asserted by authorities. A personal experience in the way that a piece was created should increase understanding of the piece.

Creating and Historical Inquiry: the search for historical parallels in form and its creation as part of the investigation. Alternatively, one develops a fuller understanding of the art that others have

created by personal experiences in creating art. And, the disciplined scholarship associated with historical inquiry is frequently associated with the creation of new theory; i.e., proposing a new understanding of a piece, an artist, or a movement

Response and Historical Inquiry: Response can be fuller if the context within which the piece was created is understood. Equally, the search for historical parallels in intended significances can be part of the analysis. Response emphasizes constructing personal significance. Historical Inquiry emphasizes understanding the intentions of individual artists, movements and, where appropriate, the 'accepted' significances derived, or constructed, by scholars.

Response and Philosophical Inquiry: In the analysis of an art form, in its interpretation, and ultimately in its evaluation, the question of the validity, or vividness, or significance of the work is brought into question. That question may lie largely in whether the quality, or degree of engagement is a result of qualities in the piece, or in the creation of a significant experience by what the individual may be prepared to bring to it.

Philosophical and Historical Inquiry: Historical Inquiry continuously examines the content and structure of the body of art; Philosophical Inquiry examines the bases for including a phenomenon in that body and for the ways by which it may be considered.

Creating and Philosophical Inquiry: How is what is being done art? How are the logical forms of thinking called for in philosophical inquiry related to what is known about creative thinking? Are they antithetical, or complementary?